



Swedish Council for
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How international master's students in Sweden experience their studies

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Contact person: Jari Rusanen

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How international master's students in Sweden experience their studies

- International master's students experience financial difficulties more often than domestic master's students.
- International master's students who work alongside their studies are more often dependent on their work income than domestic master's students who work.
- A clear majority of international master's students are satisfied with their education in Sweden.
- Teachers have a particularly important role for this student group.

This publication examines how international master's students in Sweden experience their studies.

International students who come to Sweden for their master's studies are an important addition to the education system. The Swedish National Audit Office's review of third-country students¹ from 2024 shows that these students perform well and constitute an important recruitment base for research and work in Sweden². In addition, some of them pay for their education through tuition fees. The Swedish Council for Higher Education supports the work of making life easier for incoming master's students and making Sweden more attractive as a study destination, among other things through its work within the Platform for Internationalisation, Plint.³

The results come from the Eurostudent 8 survey conducted in spring 2022⁴. Eurostudent is a recurring survey that compares economic and social conditions for students in Europe.

In this publication, international students refer to people who have an upper secondary diploma or equivalent from a country other than Sweden. Swedish citizens with a foreign upper secondary diploma have been excluded. In the report, we have chosen to only look at international students studying master's programmes. For a comparison group, we have used domestic

¹ Students who are citizens of a country outside the EU/EEA

² The Swedish National Audit Office's report "Third-country students in higher education" RiR 2025:21

³ Cooperation between the Swedish Institute (SI), Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ), Swedish Council for Higher Education (UHR), Swedish Research Council and Vinnova

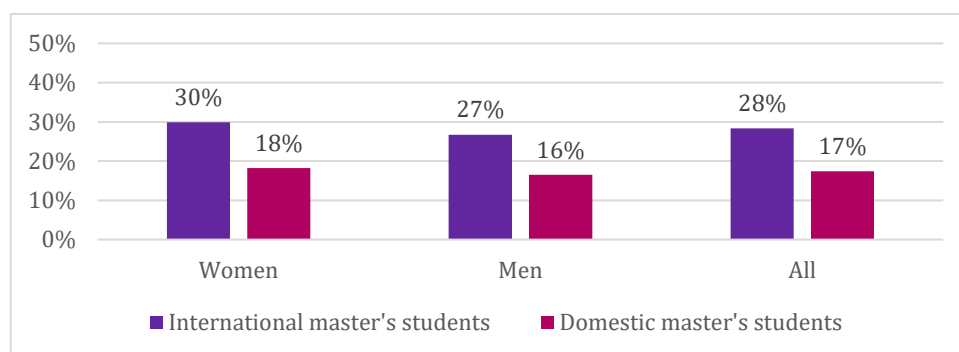
⁴ In Sweden, 7,293 students out of 40,000 responded to the Eurostudent 8 survey (18 % response rate). Of these, 422 were international master's students and 619 were domestic master's students.

master's students who have participated in Eurostudent 8. Of the international master's students, 49 percent were men and 51 percent were women, and among the domestic master's students, 44 percent were men and 56 percent were women.

Financial difficulties more common among international master's students

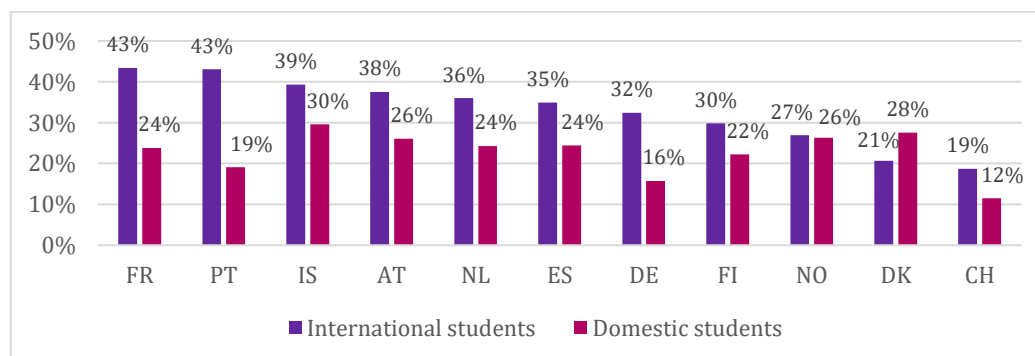
International master's students reported more financial problems than domestic students. In Eurostudent 8, 28 percent of international master's students in Sweden reported financial problems compared to 17 percent of domestic master's students. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Financial difficulties, international and domestic master's students



Similar patterns emerge in other countries' Eurostudent surveys, where international students are more likely to have a worse financial situation than domestic students.⁵ Denmark is the only country in the comparison where domestic students are more likely to have financial difficulties than international students (probably due to a generous grant and loan scheme available to international students). See Figure 2 below.

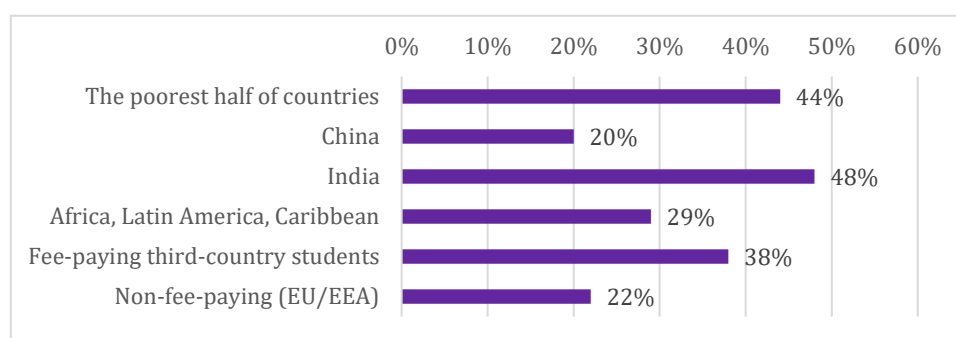
Figure 2. Proportion of students with financial difficulties in some countries in Europe



⁵ Open database of Eurostudent results <https://database.eurostudent.eu/drm/>

International students are a heterogeneous group with differences often depending on where the student comes from. Among international master's students with their first degree from the half of the world's countries with the lowest gross domestic product⁶, 44 percent stated that they had financial problems to a high or very high degree. China and India are the two countries from which the absolute largest proportion of incoming students come to Sweden. If we look at students from these two countries, the corresponding proportion for China was only 20 percent and for India 48 percent. The difference was also large depending on whether the students were fee-paying (students from outside the EU/EEA, so-called third country) or exempt from fees (EU/EEA and Swiss students) in Sweden. Of those who were fee-paying, 38 percent considered themselves to have financial problems, while the corresponding proportion for those who were non-fee-paying was 22 percent. See Figure 3 below.

Figure 3. Proportion with financial difficulties, international master's students in Sweden (different groups according to origin of first degree)



Earned income is important for many international master's students

Of the international master's students, 36 percent stated that they had paid work or paid internships alongside their studies during the semester, compared with 56 percent of the domestic master's students. It is probably more difficult for international students to find work as knowledge of Swedish is often required. This can negatively impact their finances. The international master's students who found employment less often had work or paid internships closely linked to their studies, 23 percent compared with 40 percent of the domestic master's students. It may be more difficult for international master's students to compete for the jobs that are linked to their studies. A significantly higher proportion of the international master's

⁶ Countries with GDP per capita among the lowest 50% in the world
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_\(nominal\)_per_capita](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_GDP_(nominal)_per_capita)

students who worked were also dependent on their work income to be able to study, compared with domestic working master's students, 46 percent and 37 percent respectively. It is mainly the male students in this group who state that they are dependent on this income (52 percent). See table 1 below.

Table 1. Proportion of international master's students and work-related issues

Have had work/paid internship during the semester	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	34%	63%
Men	38%	47%
All	36%	56%
Very close connection between work and studies		
Women	28%	46%
Men	18%	31%
All	23%	40%
Need work income to be able to study		
Women	39%	37%
Men	52%	36%
All	46%	37%

Most international master's students are satisfied with their studies

Many of both international and domestic master's students would recommend their programmes, 71 percent of international master's students and 78 percent of domestic students.

Of the international master's students, 55 percent think that a Swedish education prepares them well or very well for the international job market, compared to 41 percent of the domestic master's students. When it comes to preparing them for the Swedish job market, however, the opposite is true, with 46 percent for the international master's students and 57 percent for domestic. Master's students from the other Nordic countries had similar answers to the domestic students and it can be assumed that they often both speak/understand Swedish and see Sweden as a possible future job market, unlike the other international master's students.

A majority of international master's students are satisfied with their teachers, around 59 percent believe that the teaching staff are extremely good at explaining things (compared to 61 percent for domestic students), 64 percent believe that the teaching staff normally give helpful feedback on the student's performance in the course/course component (45 percent for domestic students) and 57 percent believe that the teaching staff motivate to do one's best work (44 percent for domestic students). Teachers thus seem to play a particularly important role for many international master's students. See table 2 below.

Table 2. Percentage of international and domestic master's students who agree with the following statements

I would recommend my current study programme.	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	67%	79%
Men	76%	77%
All	71%	78%
I believe that my current studies prepare me well for the international job market.	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	51%	36%
Men	60%	48%
All	55%	41%
I believe that my current studies prepare me well for the Swedish job market.	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	39%	57%
Men	54%	57%
All	46%	57%
The teaching staff are extremely good at explaining things.	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	59%	60%
Men	58%	61%
All	59%	61%
The teaching staff normally give me helpful feedback on my performance in the course/course component.	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	60%	40%
Men	68%	50%
All	64%	45%
The teaching staff motivate me to do my best work.	International master's students	Domestic master's students
Women	55%	45%
Men	59%	42%
All	57%	44%

Conclusions

International master's students more often experience financial difficulties than domestic master's students. If you look at different subgroups according to country of origin, there are large differences. However, consistently, all these groups report greater financial difficulties than domestic students. Compared to domestic students, fewer have jobs alongside their studies, but those who do are more dependent on this income than domestic students. The international master's students who work also contribute to Sweden's economy. It is beneficial for Sweden that many of them stay in the country after graduation.

A clear majority of international master's students are satisfied with their education in Sweden. Most of them think that their studies prepare them well for the international job market. However, most of them do not think that the education prepares them as well for the Swedish job market, most likely because they initially are determined to move from Sweden when their studies are completed and look for a job in the international job market.

One conclusion is there may be a need to further strengthen students' connection to working life in Sweden to increase the opportunity to retain talents that are important for Swedish skills supply. Universities can play an important role by offering career support, internship opportunities, contacts with employers, guidance on how Swedish working life works and intensive courses in Swedish. In this way, they can facilitate students' future establishment in the Swedish labour market.

Teachers have a particularly important role for many international master's students. An active and inclusive pedagogical approach contributes to student motivation, opinion on the quality of education and opportunities to establish themselves in Sweden. Therefore, it is important to strengthen teachers' intercultural competence, for example through international exchanges and collaborations. The cooperation between authorities through the government assignment Work in Sweden⁷ and the public authority network Plint also aims to get more people to stay in the country.

⁷ [Work in Sweden - Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth](#)

Education, exchange and development – for everyone who wants to advance

Swedish Council for Higher Education is an authority that creates the conditions to meet the need for competence, now and in the future.

We promote lifelong learning and open doors to education, careers and working life both in Sweden and internationally. We also make it easier to find, choose and apply for an education so that everyone who wants to continue has the opportunity to find their place.

To succeed, we manage and develop digital platforms and services in collaboration with the education sector. We also contribute insights and recommendations that strengthen Sweden as a knowledge nation.